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**University of South Carolina Aiken  
Annual Accountability Report**

**Fiscal Year 1997-1998**

## **Introduction**

USC Aiken continues the assessment of its institutional effectiveness as a demonstration of its commitment to quality in all its programs and services. Faculty and staff have consistently presented at both national and state assessment conferences in such areas as the 360 Degree Evaluation System; Retention; Exemplary Assessments in the Majors; the Writing Portfolio; Capstone Courses, and the wide variety of methodologies used to assure quality through assessment and performance review.

This report consists of a summary assessment, outcomes and uses of outcomes in the five areas required for reporting under the revised guidelines issued by the Commission on Higher Education on May 13, 1998. Included are reports on 1) General Education, 2) Majors and Concentrations which includes a full report for English, and interim reports for Psychology, Sociology History, and Political Science, 3) Academic Advising, 4) Procedures for Student Development, and 5) Library Resources and Services.

USC Aiken employs a multiple measure approach and encourages all units to use a mixture of assessment methodologies such as capstone courses, senior theses/projects, interviews, surveys, portfolios, standardized instruments when appropriate, grade and course patterns, etc. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment assists the units in evaluating and improving their assessment programs with the goal of using outcomes to improve the quality of the institution through improvement of the total teaching and learning environment.

## **General Education**

The Academic Assessment Committee was charged with creating measurable goals for General Education at USC Aiken. The five operational goal definitions for general education are: 1) Thinking critically and analytically, questioning, searching out concepts. 2) Communicating effectively using numerical, notational, verbal and other symbolic systems. 3) Exploring Values Openly and Honestly: USC Aiken students should be able to articulate alternative points of view on a single subject. 4) Finding and Examining Relationships Among Disciplines, Concepts and Areas of Study: USC Aiken students should demonstrate the ability to use concepts, methods, and perspectives of more than one discipline in an interrelated manner. 5) Appreciating Cross-Cultural Perspectives: USC Aiken students a) should be able to explain the impact of their values and experiences on their ability to see the world from a variety of cultural and subcultural perspectives, b) should be able to objectively explore other cultures in order to arrive at more informed understandings of the world, and c) should be able to demonstrate a curiosity and/or desire to learn about different peoples or cultures.

In order to measure the achievement of these goals in general education, USC Aiken administers the College Base to all incoming freshmen and beginning in Spring 1998 will test all exiting seniors. In addition, considerable time this year was spent in the committee's creation of Test Booklet 13 and 14 to augment the College Base in measuring the above goals 3 through 5 of General Education. To evaluate the above goals, Booklets 13 and 14 use a variety of charts, graphs, and opposing viewpoints to which students must respond in a written manner. Although these booklets were piloted in 1997, an appropriate scoring rubric is still under development; therefore no results are yet available for this pilot. Beginning in fall 1998, more students will complete Test Booklets 13 and 14 for a better sample with which to develop a rubric. There will be a cross-

section of faculty trained to score these Test Booklets from a cross-section of academic departments. Selection and training will commence in 1998-99.

## **Majors and Concentrations**

### **DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

#### **Full Assessment Report**

The USCA English Department's mission is to provide students with an understanding and appreciation of the written word, both as writers and as readers of significant literature. To that end, the Department has three major purposes: 1) to provide students throughout the University with experience in thinking creatively and critically and in writing articulately about ideas in general, 2) to provide a variety of electives for students engaged in either a liberal arts education or a professional program of study, and 3) to provide English majors with background for graduate studies in English or preparation for careers that draw on communication skills and critical thinking abilities.

In addition to course work designed to meet these goals, the Department of English provides other support, such as a) a campus literary arts magazine entitled BROKEN INK; b) a campus chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society; c) three writing awards: the Kaplan Award in Expository Writing, the Oswald Freshman Writing Award, and the Oswald Creative Writing Award; and d) the Writing Room.

For the Composition Sequence within English which consists of lower level sequential English courses, the seven objectives (see report on file at Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, USC Aiken) are imbedded into each instructor's syllabus and are addressed in every section of the composition sequence. The current assessment involves a program portfolio containing a call for papers generated at each level of the sequence. Random samples of the portfolios are evaluated by four (faculty) readers at the end of the fall and spring semesters each year.

**Expected Results:** All students exiting English 101 /102 sequence must make a C or better.

On the average, randomly selected portfolio evaluations should reflect student writing at a "competent" level, that is a qualitative score of 3 on a 1 -5 scale.

#### **Outcomes: GOALS ACHIEVED**

Yes: in 1994-95, students scored 3.4 (on a 1-5 scale) on class portfolios. Yes: in 1995-96, students scored 3.4 (on a 1-5 scale) on class portfolios. Yes: in 1996-97, students scored 3.3 (on a 1-5 scale) on class portfolios.

#### **USE OF FINDINGS**

The Department has continued to meet its goals. The portfolio assessment demonstrates consistent, valid and reliable improvements in student writing skills across the composition sequence. In addition, the recommendations made in the 1996 report are as follows:

1. The Assessment Committee is encouraging instructors to provide fuller assignment handouts so that there can be some synthesis between assignment expectations and the reading of the portfolios. As a result, the Department is evaluating portfolios with more understanding of the contexts of the assignments.
2. Improved sampling and full implementation have given the Committee sufficient portfolios to warrant both fall and spring evaluation sessions.
3. The Department continues to share information with our counterparts at Aiken Technical College to ensure that transfer students in the local area are sufficiently prepared for upper-division work.
4. The Department conducted cross-disciplinary surveys and interviews during the spring/summer/and fall of 1996 to begin preparing for implementation of the rising junior proficiency portfolio and the scheduling of AEGL 201: Writing in the University. The Department is relying on the process of composition



program assessment (data gathering, interpretation, recommendations, and looping of findings back into the program) to guide us during the current implementation of the rising junior portfolio program.

In the fall of 1997, the Department Assessment Committee suggested that all instructors of AEGL 101 place more emphasis on use of multiple sources across several assignments as opposed to one end-of-semester research paper. The members of the committee felt that the freshman composition assessment instrument revealed that many students continue to struggle with the synthesis of sources.

#### Assessment of the English Major:

The Department has established 7 goals for those students who have majors in English (see Report on file, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment). Methods of Assessment for the 7 Goals for English majors include such things as a Senior Project and a Senior Exit Survey/ Interview.

**Expected Results:** All students must demonstrate they have met these goals by completing a senior project consisting of a senior seminar or senior thesis, with an average score of a 3.5 on a scale of 1-5. The senior paper is evaluated through an oral defense and both options require a senior project. With respect to the senior exit survey/interview, at least 80% of the graduating seniors are expected to rate their overall experience as good or excellent (4 or 5 on a 1-5 scale).

**Outcomes:** The Department has generated 7 years of data on the senior project, including group average scores with up to 24 categories of performance tied to the goals and objectives of the English degree program. The group average for each of the 7 years is 3.5 on a 1-5 scale indicating stable satisfaction rates. The goals of the Department were achieved by this outcome. In addition, in 1996-97, 100% of the graduating seniors rated their degree program experience as good or excellent.

**Use of Findings:** In the fall of 1992 the Department used these findings to include a research component in all literature classes at the 200 and above level. In 1992-93 after the third year, the English Department changed its enrollment procedures so that all class members must have senior standing. In addition, through the assessment results the oral defense was instituted and in fall 1996 a competency sheet was created for projects outside of the traditional mode. In the fall of 1997, the Department voted to drop one of the 7 goals (acquisition of a general knowledge of literatures outside of British and American), since the current emphasis of the Department's offerings is mainly British and American literature.

#### Writing Room Assessment

The Writing Room set as a major goal the increased use of its facilities and resources to support the 6 goals of the Department of English. The Writing Room has continued to serve more students (a 180% increase in individual sessions from 1990-91 to 1996-97). All goals have been achieved, and the Writing Room has hired a full time Director, and relocated to its new facility and has been able to add 8 computers, bringing its total up to 20 for student use.

The English Department is committed to continuing the assessment of its goals as a

#### HISTORY INTERIM ASSESSMENT REPORT

**Assessment procedures:** A senior check for advisors to help keep students on track through graduation, capstone course, final thesis project, portfolio, and student evaluations of faculty. **Outcomes:** 1) Through the capstone course and senior thesis, faculty found weaknesses in students being able to discern historical interpretations; 2) Students need more time to complete the senior thesis (number of incompletes were rising); 3) Writing skills of bottom quartile students were weaker than expected.

**Use of Assessment: Curricular Changes:** 1) Elimination of Senior Seminar, retention of Senior thesis, and a return to a methodology course as a major requirement; 2) Revision of AHST 499A, 499 course from a one semester course with 3 credit hours to a two-semester sequence (Thesis Preparation - 2 hrs.; Thesis Completion - 1 hr.); 3) Support of a rising junior writing portfolio campus-wide to improve writing skills.

## **POLITICAL SCIENCE INTERIM ASSESSMENT REPORT**

**Assessment procedures:** A senior check for advisors to help keep students on track through graduation; capstone course; final thesis project; portfolio; student evaluations of faculty

**Outcomes** 1) Through the capstone course and senior thesis, the Department concluded that the seminar was redundant with the methodology course; 2) Students needed more time to complete the senior thesis (number of incompletes were rising); 3) A review of the portfolio found that the writing skills of students in the bottom quartile were weaker than should be expected.

**Use of Assessment: Curricular Changes:** 1) Elimination of Senior Seminar, retention of Senior Thesis and a return to a methodology course as a major requirement. 2) Hired one additional faculty member, C. Botsch. 3) Revision of senior seminar into two sequences APLS 499 A Preparation of Senior Thesis and APLS 499 B Completion of Senior Thesis. After assessing the results of this change, the department decided to create an alternative capstone course, a senior seminar that offers a classroom setting with an instructor. Students with a 3.5 GPA in political science courses and a 3.0 overall GPA would have the option to take a seminar or write a thesis. All other students have to take a seminar and research and write a thesis. 4) Support of a rising junior writing portfolio campus-wide. 5) Campus Difference Goal: Encouragement of cyberspace classes through the creation of a "social sciences" student laboratory. 6) Utilization of majors in employment in the Population Research Lab.

## **PSYCHOLOGY INTERIM REPORT**

**Assessment Procedures:** Textbook adoption standardized for Introduction Psychology; every three years a monitoring of completers of 300 course sequence; every three years an alumni survey; review research results of students and monitor student success with publications; administer the ETS Major Field test in Psychology (mandatory degree requirement); senior exit survey; five year reviews by CHE and SACS.

**Outcomes:** 1996-97 ETS Major Field Test outcomes were above national means on 10 of the 11 indicators; senior exit surveys showed approximately 100% satisfaction rate with advisement, classroom experiences, research experiences and field experiences with only a few areas of slight dissatisfaction such as preparation for graduate school (16%), preparing for employment (31 %), word processing skills on computer (23%), using data analysis application on computer (39%) and the ability to learn new computer programs (46%); grade distribution of psychology courses completed review; Alumni Survey showed a 62% overall satisfaction rate.

**Use of Assessment: Curricular change:** Strengthening computer swills with addition of APSY 225L Quantitative Analysis Lab required of all majors as of 1995. With the addition of this course, it is anticipated that the Measurement and Methodology Assessment Indicator of the ETS Major Field Test (the only result of this assessment that was below the national means) will show improvement also.

## **SOCIOLOGY INTERIM REPORT**

**Assessment procedures:** An exit survey of graduating seniors, survey of alumni, tracking of Sociology majors, evaluation of a major portfolio, voluntary GRE score reports of students continuing on to graduate school.

**Outcomes:** 1) Exit interviews: Major strength: The Sociology Department was rated as good or excellent by 94% of its graduating seniors. The major weakness: Course rotation was frequently mentioned as a weakness. 2) More students are being retained to graduation in Sociology. The retention rate of 21 % is higher than that reported in 1995,96 and 97. With many non-traditional age students in the program, stopping out or moving, negatively affects this rate. 3) 17 portfolio reviews indicate that program objectives are being met.

**Use of Findings:** Curricular change in required courses for the major, request for additional faculty, lack of paper submissions for certain courses discussed.



## Academic Advising

The Office of Academic Advisement coordinates advisement for the entire campus, which includes thirteen academic units. The mission of the Office of Academic Advisement is to assist students in the development of meaningful educational plans compatible with their life goals.

Once the student arrives on campus he/she is required to attend orientation. After orientation the advisement and registration process begins. The student makes an appointment with his/her advisor, and together they select courses for the current semester and plan for future semesters. When the student and the advisor complete their session the student takes his/her copy of the advisement form to the registration center. The advisement form is proof of advisement; all degree seeking students must have this form (signed by the advisor) to begin the registration process.

### Advisor Training

All new faculty must complete new faculty orientation. A discussion of academic advising by the Director of Academic Advisement is one of the components of this orientation program. In addition, the Director also schedules individual appointments with new faculty members to acquaint them with policy and procedures of advising. Also, during the semester the Office of Academic Advisement offers training sessions for all advisors, new and veteran. These sessions are two hours in length and are scheduled a few weeks before advisement and early registration for the subsequent semester. There are approximately twelve of these sessions scheduled at various times each semester. New advisors are required to attend and veteran advisors must attend every three years. It is during these sessions that current policy and procedures are reinforced and new ones are introduced. Any changes in procedure or new procedures are also communicated to the advisors by memo immediately before each advisement and registration period. Each advisor is provided with an advisement manual, as a training and a reference tool.

Veteran advisors are required to attend mandatory training sessions every three years. Of course if any major changes occur between these times, training sessions are held as needed. New advisors are trained as new faculty are hired.

As a part of the effort to ensure academic success for all of our students, the Office of Academic Advisement sends each advisor a list of his/her advisees before the advisement and registration period each semester. This list includes the student's cumulative hours carried, cumulative hours earned, cumulative grade point hours, and cumulative grade point average. The advisors are asked to review the list to see if any of their advisees may be headed towards academic trouble. For students not making satisfactory academic progress, the advisors are to contact these students to determine what kinds of problems they may be experiencing. From their discussion, the advisors can then refer the student to the appropriate support area (Math Lab, Writing Lab, Tutoring Center, Career Services, Advisement Center, Counseling Center, etc.) for assistance.

### Evaluation and Assessment

In the spring of 1993, with the help of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, a survey of the advisement and registration process was conducted. The overall results of the survey were positive.

More recently, students have been surveyed regarding their satisfaction with the Office of Advisement Services and their satisfaction with the advisement they received from faculty within their chosen major. The results are provided below. These surveys are conducted with a large representative sample of the institution's current student population. *As the data shows, there has been a trend of increasing satisfaction (with the exception of 1996) with advisement by faculty, as well as increased satisfaction with the Office of Advisement Services, by current students.* In addition to these measures, as a part of yearly program assessment within the major, each academic unit includes a section regarding academic advisement. The responses to that section have been traditionally very positive.

Alumni surveys have been conducted asking the past graduates how satisfied they were with the advisement they received by faculty within their chosen major. Alumni are surveyed three or four years after graduation.

The following results have been found from alumni. While the satisfaction with advisement of current students is increasing, the level of satisfaction with alumni tends to be decreasing. The Office of Advisement is continuing to monitor this trend.

## **ALUMNI SURVEY RESULTS**

### **PERCENT SATISFIED WITH FACULTY**

#### **ACADEMIC YEAR OF GRADUATION ADVISEMENT WITHIN THE CHOSEN MAJOR**

1989-90 95.0%

1990-91 95.5%

1991-92 92.4%

1992-93 85.1%

1993-94 81.1%

## **Procedures for Student Development**

### **Purpose and Methods**

Over the past three years, the Student Life and Services Division has engaged in a variety of activities to assess its programs and services. These activities have focused on (a) ascertaining if the variety and depth of support services provided to students is sufficient to meet their needs, (b) determining if students are satisfied with the services provided, (c) evaluating the extent to which students are aware of and utilize the services and programs provided, and (d) assessing the impact that programs and services have on students.

The assessment methods used included comprehensive program reviews conducted by each department annually, comparison of USCA programs and services to CAS (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Student Services) Standards (or other professional standards when program areas were not covered by CAS), analysis of relevant data from campus-wide surveys, and development and/or utilization of department specific or program -specific assessment measures.

## **RESULTS**

**Variety and Depth of Support Services**--The questions to be addressed in this area are: "Does USCA have programs/services available in all relevant areas and is the programming sufficient to meet the needs of the students?" The annual program reviews conducted by each department (which included an evaluation of USCA programs compared to the programs offered at similar institutions) and the review of USCA programs against CAS standards were the two methods used for evaluation.

From the reviews conducted in this area, it appears that USCA provides programming in all of the areas deemed essential or important in this field. However, there are several areas where the depth of services provided could be improved. Over the past few years, the interest in or need for programming or services in the areas of Disability Services, alcohol and drug education, sexual assault prevention, and Greek Life has grown. Because of limited staffing levels and financial resources, only limited programs are offered in each of these areas. These are areas that will be addressed over the next several years.

**Satisfaction with Services**--The level of satisfaction that students have with the programs and services offered is assessed through evaluations conducted after individual events and through questions that are included in annual surveys conducted by the USCA Assessment Office. The evaluations administered by departments after individual events (study skills workshops, multicultural programs, leadership activities, etc.) consistently



indicate that students are very satisfied with the programs and services offered. This satisfaction level is also reflected in the results of the annual student surveys. Several key points highlighted by the results of the 1997 Student Opinion Survey include:

- Satisfaction levels for the Student Services programs and services addressed by the survey (Student Activities, Counseling Center, New Student Orientation, Disabled Student Services, Minority Services, Public Safety, Athletics, Intramural Sports, and Programming Board) ranged from 95.8% (Disabled Student Services) to 89.3% (Public Safety) with all areas receiving satisfaction ratings of 90% or above, except Public Safety at 89.3%.
- The satisfaction rating for New Student Orientation in 1997 was 93.4% compared to a satisfaction rating of 84% in 1994. Since 1995, the program has undergone extensive review and revision to address student needs.

Impact of Programs and Services on Student Growth & Development--Evaluation of student growth and development is assessed with questions on the USCA Alumni Survey administered by the Institutional Research and Assessment Office with periodic evaluations of programs and services offered to determine their potential contributions to student development at USCA. Highlights of the most recent Alumni Survey include:

- Of the 1992 and 1993 graduates surveyed, 65% felt that their ability to appreciate cross-cultural differences increased very much or a moderate amount as a result of their experience in general education courses at USCA. Cross-cultural appreciation reflects a strong USCA general education goal (see General Education)

73% of these graduates felt that their ability to explore values openly and critically increased very much or a moderate amount as a result of their experience in general education courses. The exploration of values reflects a strong USCA general education goal (see General Education).

- 51 % felt that their educational experiences contributed very much or somewhat to their growth in the area of caring for their physical and mental health, 91 % felt that these experiences contributed very much or somewhat to their growth in working cooperatively in a group, 87% felt that these experiences contributed to their ability to organize their time effectively, and 81 % felt that these experiences contributed to their ability to lead or guide others.

## USES OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS

During the past several years a variety of improvements have occurred as a result of the assessment of USCA student services. The following is a highlight of those changes. The Emerging Leaders program, which was originally designed as a non-credit leadership development course for freshmen, has been expanded. The course, which is now offered for credit, is open to all students who meet the minimum grade point average requirement. Enrollment in the course has doubled since the changes were made.

A Peer Educator program was implemented in the Spring of 1998. The program, which utilizes four undergraduate USCA students to present workshops and seminars on a variety of topics, is designed to educate USCA students and to help them develop. In addition, it provides a wonderful development opportunity for the students chosen as peer educators.

The Community Service program was strengthened through the establishment of a database of information about community service opportunities and the establishment of a reporting and tracking system for community service activities conducted by students. Community service activity has been further encouraged by the presentation of Community Service awards at the annual Student Activities Awards Banquet.

## Library Resources and Services

In 1997, the Library was recognized by the Commission on Higher Education and other state system libraries for its exemplary efforts to assess library resources and services.

Formal assessment methods for the period since the 1994-95 Institutional Effectiveness Report consists of annual surveys of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, classified employees and alumni; collecting circulation, attendance, inter-library loan and reference question data; checking the collection against standard bibliographies; soliciting comments from on-line patrons via the guest book on the Library's Homepage; comparing the Library with national standards of the Association of College and Research Libraries; and conducting evaluations for external agencies such as the National League for Nursing.

Annual survey results reveal increasing satisfaction with the Library overall for this reporting period. The satisfaction level changes dramatically with specific questions regarding the adequacy of the book and journal collection. These percentages, however, have experienced an upward trend since the last report. Service quality questions all received a majority of positive responses.

Aiken has had two graduate programs, the Masters in Elementary Education and the Masters in Clinical Psychology, for which the Library conducted in-depth appraisals of resources owned or necessary to support the programs. Funds were allocated to address deficiencies in both areas. Additionally, program reviews in English, Biology/Geology, and Chemistry were conducted for the CHE and the Library provided special collection appraisals in these subjects; a library resource appraisal for a new degree proposal in Communication was also completed; and documentation relating to library support for **NCATE and AACSB** accreditation, for SACS accreditation for the Masters in Elementary Education and for NLN accreditation reaffirmation has been compiled during this period. Again, needs have been addressed as funding allowed.

At the end of the 96/97 FY, the Library's ratings according to the ALA Standards for College Libraries, were: Collection 104% (A), Staff 75% (B), Space 70% (C). The "A" rating on the collection is somewhat misleading. While this represents a major accomplishment for the University, areas with deficiencies have been identified using the various assessment methods and are being addressed. Space will become a critical need in the not-too-distant future and the Administration is aware of this.

The Gregg-Graniteville Library can be proud of its effectiveness in fulfilling its purpose. Things are never static and improvement is constantly being pursued.

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